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Medieval Romance and British Romanticism: Gender Constructions in Pullman's "His Dark Materials" and Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings"

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In a 1999 interview, Philip Pullman, author of *His Dark Materials*, replied to a question about gender, saying, "Eve is the equal of Adam and shares in whatever it is that happens" (Pullman, Parsons par. 30). J.R.R Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* expressed a different attitude toward male and female. In a letter to his son in 1941, Tolkien wrote, "A man has a life-work, a career… A young woman, even one 'economically independent' as they say now … begins to dream of a home, almost at once" (*Letters* 50). Tolkien's notion of the sexes does not attribute to them equality, and his trilogy reflects this. As two Tolkien scholars have already noted, "Women were considered intellectually inferior… on the interest scale … they were not even considered … Tolkien incorporated [this view] into his mythic structures" (Fredrick and McBride 7).

Presumably the forty year difference that separates these two authors and their works—*The Fellowship of the Ring* was first published in 1954, *The Golden Compass* in 1995—provides an explanation or accounts in some way for their varying conceptions of gender. However, in this paper, I will try to demonstrate that the time period in which each of these authors was born does not alone explain the qualities that comprise masculinity and femininity in their works; I will argue that each author's construction of gender is swayed by the literary movement through which their subcreative works find inspiration, and that exploring this fact elucidates the identities of Pullman's and Tolkien's male and female characters and contributes to a greater overall understanding of their works.

In the same 1999 interview mentioned above, Pullman was quoted saying "[*His Dark Materials*] is not a fantasy. It's a work of stark realism" (par. 42). Likewise, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote of *The Lord of the Rings* in a letter to W.H. Auden, claiming that "Middle-earth is not an

imaginary world. The name is the modern form of … an ancient name for … the objectively real world … The theatre of my tale is this earth" (*Letters* 239). According to their authors, Pullman's and Tolkien's fictional worlds, despite their fantastic nature, contain a measure of realism—"stark" for Pullman and historical for Tolkien. Yet the "realities" of their secondary worlds are strikingly different. Following in line with Pullman's own "Read like a butterfly, write like a bee" approach, I will first demonstrate how Pullman and Tolkien admit to borrowing from distinctly different literary movements in order to construct their secondary worlds (*HDM* 934). Tolkien incorporates themes and conventions of medieval romance as depicted in *Beowulf* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, while Pullman integrates elements of Blakean Romanticism.

Establishing Tolkien's link to *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* does not take much effort. Scholars have written that Tolkien's work shows a reverence for "'the true tradition' of medieval literature" (Drout 26) and that "[Tolkien] draws much of his specific material from *Beowulf*, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*" (Flieger, *Medieval Epic* 157). Because of his "philological mind," Tolkien focused his scholarly work primarily upon Anglo-Saxon literature, Old and Middle English texts (*Letters* 11-12). He delivered a lecture series in 1936, compiled into print and titled "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," that Michael Drout declares "the most important essay ever written about Beowulf" (qtd. in *Encyclopedia* 57). Clearly knowledgeable about the work, Tolkien admits its influence on his own writing in a letter to the *Observer*, saying, "Beowulf is among my most valued sources … the episode of the theft arose naturally almost inevitably from the circumstances" (*Letters* 31). Among Tolkien's letters, there are at least twelve references to *Beowulf*.

There are seven references to King Arthur and Arthurian legend. Tolkien valued such stories for their contributions to English literature and national identity (Flieger 157). In one of his letters, Tolkien wrote that "comparisons [of *The Lord of the Rings*] with Spenser, Malory, and Arioso … [were] too much for [his] vanity" (*Letters* 181). While Tolkien wasn't entirely approving of Malory's approach to mythology—"the Arthurian world … is imperfectly naturalized … too lavish and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive" (*Letters* 144) —he may have been engaging in what Harold Bloom in "Clinamen: Towards a Theory of Fantasy" referred to as *clinamen*, "poetic misreading or misprision proper" (6). Essentially, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* may seek to correct the flaws he sees in the Arthurian world.

Philip Pullman's connection to British Romanticism and especially his literary relationship with William Blake is similarly explicit. On the page of acknowledgments at the end of *His Dark Materials*, Pullman writes, "I have stolen ideas from every book I have ever read … But there are three debts that need acknowledgment above all the rest … The third is to the works of William Blake" (934). In the epigraphs prefacing each chapter of *The Amber Spyglass* (thirty-seven in total), ten are from Blake. (Other Romantic writers are also featured; Coleridge earns an epigraph, as does Keats and Byron.)

Furthermore, in a 2007 interview, Pullman described his materialist view of consciousness as a property of matter, adding, "This is the line I take myself, in the company of poets such as Wordsworth and Blake" (Pullman, Chattaway par. 7). Pullman has also admitted to borrowing from one of Blake's prominent themes: the journey from innocence to experience (Pullman, Abbots par. 9). He is particularly fond of quoting Blake: "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's" (as qtd. in Bird 195) and "Eternity is in love with the productions of Time" (Pullman, Chattaway par. 11).

Although the extent to which Pullman's and Tolkien's works have been influenced by the works and authors mentioned above is arguable, the fact that they have drawn inspiration from these previous literary works and authors cannot be denied. As a result, an examination of how such connections might affect the portrayals of gender in each author's secondary world is not without justification. In the following sections, I will draw significant links between the gender constructions present in *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* and those present in *The Lord of the Rings*, and do likewise for *His Dark Materials* and the Blakean prophecies.

"Like many other medieval romance texts, *Le Morte d'Arthur* focuses on the masculine activity … fighting, questing, ruling," writes Dorsey Armstrong, author of *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*. In the same way, "Beowulf is also an overwhelmingly masculine poem" (Overing 1). Following the pattern of these medieval works, *The Lord of the Rings* includes many male and few female characters. "Women are almost entirely absent from *The Lord of the Rings*," writes Tolkien scholar Michael Drout (26). This imbalance is significant, not only as it relates to the construction of the feminine, but also the masculine. Because male characters account for the majority in Tolkien's trilogy, they are, in a sense, limited to functional roles; they are responsible for moving the plot along and for making it interesting by doing daring, exciting things. The minority female characters hover in the margins, entering the story only when the male-dominated quest crosses their paths. Mirroring constructions of gender in *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, constructions of gender in *The Lord of the Rings* can be said to adhere to three main themes: virtue, vocation, and vice.

The virtues that ought to be espoused by men in *The Lord of the Rings* figure directly with "the chivalric code": strength, courage, wisdom, loyalty, and mercy (Armstrong 1). Examining the "great" males of *The Lord of the Rings* provides a look at how these virtues are

possessed in varying quantities by different, but all distinctly masculine characters. Aragorn, the "epic hero" (Flieger,"Postmodern" 18), embodies all of the male virtues and therefore rises as an ideal, a paradigm: he is described as "strong and stern … bold, determined, able to take his own counsel and dare great risks at need" (*Return* 83) and as "the flower of manhood … wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands" (266). The similarities between Arthur—whose reign implements the chivalric virtues in *Le Morte d'Arthur*—and Aragorn are striking; both are powerful kings who use a famous sword (Excalibur and Anduril) and whose ascensions to power usher in eras of peace. Gandalf, with his hair and beard "white as snow" is the old wizard figure, and is comparable in many ways to Merlin and whose salient virtue is wisdom (*Towers* 103). Other male characters such as Éomer—"a tall man, taller than the rest" (26) and Boromir—"a tall man… proud and stern" (*Fellowship* 269)—figure mainly as warriors, like Beowulf, whose strength and courage are highly prized. Yet Tolkien, through Gandalf, notes that "as for valour, that cannot be computed by stature" (*Return* 5). Therefore, the hobbits, though small, still participate in the full range of male virtues.

By contrast, beauty, humility, chastity, and wisdom are established as the primary female virtues. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Arthur calls Guenevere the "fairest lady that I know living" (Malory 64). In *The Lord of the Rings*, beauty, as well as nobility, is a requirement for a woman to be worthy of mention (with the exception of Rosie Cotton). Upon seeing Arwen for the first time, Frodo thinks that "such loveliness in living thing [he] had never seen before" and that "queenly she looked" (*Fellowship* 255). Galadriel is "tall and fair and white" (405) and "like a queen, great and beautiful" (423). Upon seeing Eowyn, Faramir remarks that "neither flower nor lady have I seen till now in Gondor so lovely" (*Return* 257). Feminine humility is best exemplified by Galadriel, for, despite being powerful and wise in her own right and having a

Ring of Power, she says her husband is "the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth" (*Fellowship* 400) and serves him and the male fellowship the "cup of farewell" (420). The virtuous chastity and devotion of Arwen to Aragorn allows him "the best of both worlds: the certainty of dedicated true love and the accomplishments of a masculine adventure" (Frederick and McBride 111).

In correspondence with their differing virtues, women and men have widely disparate vocations in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Fredrick and McBride put it, "Men are doers, workers, thinkers, and leaders. Women are homemakers, nurses, and distant love interests" (109). The word "vocation" (meaning "calling") is appropriate to use in its Catholic sense as Tolkien himself called *The Lord of the Rings* "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work" (*Letters* 172). In such a sense, vocation encompasses both the ideal life one ought to pursue and the fulfillment that results. Applying vocation in its religious sense to a study of gender is useful; as scholars have noted of Tolkien and fellow writers like C.S. Lewis, "Owing to … the espousal of traditional Christianity, they believed that women are not only different from men, but that they are and should be secondary to men as well" (Fredrick and McBride 159). In addition, Christian overtones features strongly in both *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, making comparisons between male and female vocation in those works and male and female vocation in *The Lord of the Rings* valid.

In answering the call of vocation, Tolkien's male characters primarily operate within the story in an outdoor, public sphere in which most of the work and all of the fighting takes place. As Elrond says, "The road must be trod … it will be very hard" (*Fellowship* 302). Masculine vocation's are active, and though they range—Éomer and Aragorn and Faramir are called to be rulers and warriors, Gandalf the guiding and wise wizard, Frodo the ring-bearer, Sam the ring-

bearer's companion, Merry and Pippin squires of Rohan and Gondor, respectively—the idea is the same: men are called to do good things.

"The ideal male in Beowulf's world," writes David Rosen, "is a drawer of boundaries" (5). This same concept orders the male vocation in Tolkien's world. Fighting battles, ruling kingdoms, counseling the forces of good, keeping evil at bay, and questing are all activities engaged in by males, who are called to actively protect and defend in order that "simple folk are free from care and fear" (*Fellowshp* 279). By contrast, these "simple folk" exist in a private, domestic sphere, a safe haven: the realm of women. In the same way that *Le Morte d'Arthur* depends upon "the threat of … violence—and the need to protect women from it" (Armstrong 36), Middle-earth revolves around the polarization of the male and female vocational spheres.

While the masculine sphere is public and dangerous, the feminine sphere is private and safe. Women have no place in a man's world of violence and danger, and this is seen clearly in the fact that they are evacuated in times of war from both Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith (excepting a few who were "skilled in healing" (*Return* 133)). The idea of a woman in war is such a foreign concept, that when Eowyn is brought into Minas Tirith, injured from battle, Imrahil asks disbelievingly, "Have even the women of the Rohirrim come to war in our need?" (119). By the same token, men are denied the idle "luxury" of safety and security; they are too busy making the world safe and secure. Tolkien wrote in one of his letters "that 'victors' never can enjoy 'victory'" (*Letters* 235). Thus, though constantly doing valiant deeds and achieving "victory," the members of the male fellowship are constantly on the move, facing pain and hardship. On their quest, if they pause, seeking "a brief respite in the midst of their masculine adventures," it is in Rivendell, Lothlorien and Edoras—the domestic domains of Arwen, Galadriel, and Eowyn (Fredrick and McBride 112). As Haldir the Elf says, "The world is indeed

full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair" (*Fellowship* 391).

Women's vocations, then, lie in the preservation of these "fair" places, and their involvement with the male quest flows out of this vocation. They act gently and passively, as healers and givers, offering objects of value to the male questers, as well opportunities for emotional expression. The gifts, like the phial—"the light of Earendil's star" (*Fellowship* 423)—play major roles in the male quest, but as extensions of female agency, they are at best passive and tenuous. Galadriel's Lothlorien provides the male fellowship with an outlet for emotion, allowing them to grieve Gandalf's death as they are "healed of hurt and weariness" (403). Galadriel also makes the fellowship cloaks (416), Eowyn dresses Merry in his Rohirrim gear (*Return* 68), and "in hope [Arwen] ma[kes] for [Aragorn] a great and kingly standard" (376). In many ways, Eowyn would seem the exception to the rule, but as will be explained later, her true vocation is a feminine one. For now, it is enough to note that when the story ends she is committed to her feminine vocation, saying, "I will be a healer and love all things that grow and are not barren" (262).

These characterizations of the masculine and feminine vocations of Middle-earth are in line with those of *Beowulf*, of which Overing writes, saying, "Men are violent, women are weak" (78), and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, of which Armstrong says, "masculine activity … [is] impossible without the presence of the feminine in the subjugated position" (1). In these narratives, as in *The Lord of the Rings*, women also fulfill their vocations in marriage, "in their transfer from one male to another, to reinforce and strengthen the homosocial ties that bind the … community" (Armstrong 48), while men fulfill their vocations in "black battle" (*Return* 162). The active nature of the masculine vocation makes men the central focus of the story, while the passivity of

the feminine vocation in *The Lord of the Rings*, as in *Beowulf*, makes women "weavers of lines of connection between tribes and between stories within the text, whose actual presence is shadowy, barely discernible" (Overing 77).

Aragorn and Arwen are paradigms of this dynamic. Their relationship embodies a "familiar romance theme—the love of a man for an unattainable woman" and in the same way that *Le Morte d'Arthur* does, " immediately pairs this motif with the masculine display of violence" (Armstrong 44). After Elrond refuses Aragorn and Arwen's betrothal, Aragorn leaves the peace of Rivendell for the violent wild— "and Aragorn went forth again to danger and toil" (*Return* 376). He does not "return" from danger and toil until the end of the third book, when he has fulfilled his vocation, become king, and can thus marry Arwen, allowing her to answer her vocation. Largely absent from *The Lord of the Rings*, Arwen contributes to the outcome of Middle-Earth mainly in her ability to join the heirs of men with the blood of the elves. Yet even this passive contribution is out of her control. She is her father's to give to another male. When Galadriel asks Aragorn if he wants anything from her, he replies, "Lady, you know all my desire, and long held in keeping the only treasure that I seek. Yet it is not yours to give me, even if you would" (*Fellowship* 421).

So as in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the "idealized and absolute dependence of women upon men" in *The Lord of the Rings* is intricately tied up with male lineage (Armstrong 47). Armstrong writes, "[Women] are stringently controlled as property under the name of the father or husband to whom they "belong" or have been "gifted" and … men acknowledge the right of another man to possess a woman, seeking to obtain access to her only through the proper channels" (53). This signifies not only the female as possession, but also the male as possessor—a concept connected with key elements of Middle-earth, the Ring of Power, greed,

and domination. Therefore, when women stray from their vocation, they show a lack of obedience to their male possessor, and when men stray from their vocation, they seek to possess too much.

For both men and women, dutiful adherence to one's vocation results in contentment; disobedience causes strife. In *Beowulf*'s warrior namesake, one finds an example of male adherence, while in *Le Morte d'Arthur*'s Guenevere, one finds an example of the female disobedience. Tolkien describes the story of Beowulf as that of "a young man, singled out by destiny, as he steps suddenly forth in his full powers" ("Beowulf" 12). Though Beowulf dies, he is successful and fulfilled in following his male vocation of "boundary-setting" and "protection" (Rosen 6), achieving what Tolkien called the "Victory of death" ("Beowulf" 13). By contrast, Guenevere has an adulterous affair that betrays her vocation as wife and queen. *Le Morte d'Arthur* sets up her calling (and indeed that of all married women) as one of fidelity and obedience to her husband. She chooses between "two ways of life"—"the first was the way of salvation, the second damnation"—and because she steps outside of her allotted role, she faces isolation, despair, and death (Taylor and Brewer 137).

In The *Lord of the Rings*, Saruman and Eowyn betray their respective vocations, and the result is unhappiness. Saruman is called to be a wizard, a wise, guiding force of good in the world, but he oversteps his bounds and seeks to possess the "power to order all things" (*Fellowship* 291), which is not granted to one in his vocational role. Though he has good intentions, Saruman becomes too much of a masculine possessor, destroying rather than protecting. He becomes of a figure of hate and misery, but Gandalf offers him a chance to redeem himself and fulfill his vocation, noting that he "missed [his] path in life" (*Towers* 206).

Saruman considers changing his path– "loathing to stay and dreading to leave"–but eventually is conquered by "pride and hate" and cannot reform (207). Later in the story, he dies as a result.

Eowyn, too, when she tries "to ride to war, like [her] brother Éomer" fails to answer her true calling (*Return* 256). In one of his letters, Tolkien writes that "she was… not really a soldier or 'amazon,' but like many brave women was capable of great military gallantry at a crisis" (*Letters* 323). So while good comes of Eowyn's stint as a warrior, it comes at the cost of her happiness; she is left "ailing and sorrowful" because she pursued a masculine vocation (*Return* 261). Discussing her fate, Gandalf declares, "It was an evil doom that set her in this path. For she is a fair maiden, fairest lady of a house of queens" (145). The same wise figure who acknowledged Saruman's misguided path recognizes Eowyn's.

However, unlike Saruman's story, Eowyn's story is one of redemption. When she gives up being a warrior, declaring, "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with great Riders" and agrees to fulfill her vocation by marrying Faramir, she is declared "healed" and can be happy (*Return* 262). She returns to an feminine, obedient role, assuming the domestic, gentle and preserving role of healer, and is then given by Éomer as a transactional object strengthening the ties between Rohan and Gondor; thus, the "the friendship of the Mark and of Gondor [is] bound with a new bond" (276). Aragorn recognizes this fact, saying, "No niggard you are, Éomer, to give thus to Gondor the fairest thing in your realm" (276).

To this point, the discussion of masculine and feminine constructions (virtue and vocation) has assumed a stance of good; that is, gender constructions have been approached with the understanding that the characters associated with them are basically good and basically seeking good, and if they fail in some way, they do so with good intentions. Examining theme of vice covers gender constructions from the stance of evil, analyzing "evil" characters and the

ways in which Tolkien creates their masculine and feminine identities. Precisely because the motivations of evil can be considered to be different than those of good (*Letters* 242-243), male and female evil requires a separate examination. *Le Morte d'Arthur*'s Mordred and *Beowulf*'s Grendel and Grendel's mother can serve as evil, gendered archetypes.

Mordred, the incestuous offspring of Arthur and his half-sister, has been described as a "horrific, inherently evil villain" (Armstrong 51) and "the most destructive element in the text" (49). As representative of a masculine construction of evil (there is no feminine construction of evil in *Le Morte d'Arthur*), Mordred poses the most significant external threat to Malory's Arthurian world because he seeks to possess that which is not his and does so with a corruptive, dominating will. *Grendel* in Beowulf is a similar, masculine representation of outcast, despised evil. Grendel, "whose main function is hostility to humanity (and its frail efforts at order and art upon earth)," is an active evil, characterized by his ability to inspire horror and fear in others ("Beowulf" 16). Beowulf, because of his strength of will and determination (and not necessarily his strength of arms), is the only man who can defeat him.

The primary male evil in Middle-earth follows these models. Tolkien has called Sauron "as near as an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible" (*Letters* 243). He is dark, threatening, corrupt, and bends others to his will. The quest to destroy the ring, to end Sauron, is one in which "neither strength nor wisdom" will do much good (*Fellowship* 302). Instead, it is Frodo's small but determined presence, his "great effort of will" (*Return* 233) which undermines Sauron's power. This masculine evil, seen in Sauron, Grendel and Mordred, is powerful foe, waging war against the forces of good. If Sauron, masculine evil, triumphs, it will be "to the ruin of all" (*Fellowship* 401).

Conversly, Grendel's mother and Shelob, as constructions of feminine evil, present a kind a female evil masculinized by violence, altogether more primitive, whose actions are more strongly linked to carnal desires and basic instincts than planned machinations. One scholar even goes so far as to call Grendel's mother "a hyper-masculine female, who is really an extension of Grendel … representative of the threatening archaic feminine" (Anderson par. 5). As Grendel's mother's presence in Beowulf is reactionary—she only enters the story in revenge because of the failure of his evil—she is in a certain sense a lesser, incapable of the rational thought and so a more animalized evil than her son, whose deliberation and intelligence set him apart (Rosen 7).

Shelob is primitive, said to have "bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts … for all living things were her food" (*Towers* 376). She devours indiscriminately, even the "bastards of the miserable mates, her own offspring, that she slew" (376). Her malice and evil is reactionary, then, in a way similar to Grendel's mother: "Shelob operates on the pleasure principle, seeking only self-satisfaction. This lack of rational capability is what necessitates her gender" (Fredrick and McBride 113). Thus, the feminine evil of Shelob is shown to be a much weaker threat than the masculine of Sauron:

> And as for Sauron: he knew where she lurked. It pleased him that she should dwell there hungry but unabated in malice, a more sure watch upon that ancient path into his land than any other that his skill could have devised. If now and again Shelob caught them to stay her appetite, she was welcome: he could spare them. And sometimes as a man may cast a dainty to his cat (*his* cat he calls her, but she owns him not) Sauron would send her prisoners that he had no better uses for. (377)

Here, a comparison of Sauron and Shelob reveals the subjugation of female vice to male vice.

Gender constructions in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* take different forms. In a 2001 interview, Pullman explained why the daemons in his trilogy are usually of the opposite sex, saying that "we each have a bit of the opposite in our make-up" (Pullman, Abbot par. 9). This idea is pivotal, not only as it relates to masculinity and femininity in *His Dark Materials*, but also as it signifies Pullman's connection to Blakean gender constructions. According to Blake, "Contraries are equally True" and "Without Contraries is no progression" (as qtd. in Ankarsjö 30). This establishes a perspective on male and female identities that differs from that inherent in the polarity of Tolkien's constructions of masculinity and femininity. Essentially, Pullman's Blakean Romantic outlook focuses on the specific internal dynamic of "contraries" like masculine and feminine, acknowledging "a bit of the opposite" or androgyny in each person, while Tolkien's outlook only creates space for generalizable external dynamics between masculine and feminine virtues, vocations, and vices.

The application of "contraries" in *His Dark Materials* stems in part from the fact that Pullman's work is an acknowledged version of the Fall. Pullman explains, "Lyra is Eve; Mary Malone is the serpent, who teaches her how to fall in love, and Will is Adam" (Pullman, Abbot par. 9). As a result, and in comparing *His Dark Materials* to Blake's Fall-related prophetic works—*The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, *America*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*—exploring gender will appropriately coincide with "an exploration of the fundamental themes of the Fall: initiation and the passage from innocence to experience, the nature of good and evil, the consequences of knowledge, and the notion of free will or individual responsibility" (Bird 112).

Pullman has admitted that the transition from innocence to experience is the "big idea" of *His Dark Materials* (Pullman, Rose). For Blake, "spiritual regeneration"—an aspirational utopia

similar to Pullman's Republic of Heaven—"is something to be won by desperate effort, not a state of grace to be entered with habitual ease" (Damrosch 136). The story's protagonists, Lyra and Will, engage in the process of maturation, trading innocence for experience, and in gaining self-awareness, lose their natural childhood grace. This loss is not viewed with nostalgia by Pullman, but is seen as necessary, because adults (and not children) are the ones who can build the Republic of Heaven. Though Lyra and Will are very capable as children, even in the very beginning of their stories, Pullman makes it clear that "innocence is not wise. We [only] read that in proverbs. Innocence is the state of grace" (Pullman, Rose). Lyra reads the alethiometer with this kind of grace, and her initiation into experience results in its loss— "You read it by grace," said Xaphania, looking at her, "and you can regain it by work" (*HDM* 909). This "regaining" is the "desperate effort" described by Blake, necessary to building a heaven on earth, and constitutes a central theme in Pullman's journey from innocence to experience.

Notably, on this journey, the elusive inner dimension to gender constructions in Pullman makes typifying their differences difficult. As Anne-Marie Bird has noted well, Pullman's work is a "'rites of passage' narrative in which the most important journey is not an external event but an inner one" (112).Yet even though Pullman's and Blake's "notion of gender equality calls for an active female, as well as an active male," the activities of Lyra and Will are colored by constructions of gender, most discernibly in the earlier sections of *His Dark Materials*, in the state of innocence and grace (Ankarsjö 3). Lyra is disobedient, breaking the rules of Jordan College without regard; she is curious and fierce, "a half-wild cat" and acts boldly and intuitively (*HDM* 27). Will acts in planned, rational ways similar to that of an adult because he has been forced to be a child caretaker. He is marked by the "fierce unhappy glare in his eyes, the tight-set lips, the jutting jaw" (301) and the "straight black brows" (302). Though not as disparate as

Tolkien, and overlapping frequently, constructions of masculine and feminine in Lyra and Will's gendered identities are still noticeably different in their innocent state of grace.

Because Pullman's thinking, like Blake's, is "guided by a resolute rejection of hierarchy," Lyra isn't subservient to Will in the way that Tolkien's females are subservient to his males (Damrosch 123). However, a closer inspection of the roles Lyra and Will assume, especially in comparison to one another, reveals another connection between Pullman and Blake. "In Blakean terms," writes scholar Magnus Ankarsjö, "the [female] Emanations [of *The Four Zoas*] are not that which the self-creates, but rather that through which it creates, the feminine principle of fecundity joined with the masculine principle of fertilization" (189). In this way, Lyra, "Mother of all" (*HDM* 527), is the fertile "imaginative" muse often represented in Romantic poetry and Will is the "male bard [seeking] the inspiration of his female muse" (Tierney 694).

Lyra embodies the decidedly feminine identity of Blake's Romantic muse primarily in the fact that she is a trickster like Blake's Enimarthon and yet reads into the "truth" of the alethiometer (Ankarsjö 75). Iorek Byrnison calls Lyra "Silvertongue" (*HDM* 257) and the Harpies declare her "Liar! Liar! Liar!" (762). When preparing to deceive the bear-king, Iofur Rakinson, Lyra demonstrates a thought process that mirrors the creative elusivity of the muse: "The idea hovered and shimmered delicately, like a soap bubble, and she dared not look at it in case it burst. But she was familiar with the way of ideas, and she let it shimmer, looking away, thinking about something else" (*HDM* 246).

If, as in Blake, Lyra is "the positive and active counterpart and companion of the male," then Will represents the more solid, practical male author (Ankarsjö 28). He is not greater than her, but different. Lyra tricks Iofur, Will "outface[s]" Iorek (*HDM* 692). The "weaker" physical

form of Lyra as a female is consistent with the often erethereal muse. In the Land of the Dead, Lyra slips and almost falls into the abyss and afterwards holds Will's hand so she doesn't slip again, looking into his "brilliant, strong eyes" (813). In this and other scenes, Will is depicted as physically stronger and often engages in violence. When the witch, Juta, kills his father, his rage is so great that the witch feels "this young wounded figure held more force and danger than she'd ever met in a human before" (*HDM* 533). So while Lyra and Will have much in common, the Romantic dynamic between inspiration and author elucidates to some degree the slight gendered differences that they exhibit. Lyra relies less on the physical and more the intuitive creative, while Will relies more on the rational and physical in order to achieve agency and desired goals.

For Lyra and Will, their initiation into the realm of experience is tied up in both sexual awakening (an initiation of self-knowledge) and difficult, mature choice (an initiation of responsibility). Though both Lyra and Will experience sexual awakening in the final chapters of *His Dark Materials*, Lyra's sexual self-awareness is emphasized. As she listens to the serpent, Mary Malone, tempt her by passing on stories of love and sexual sharing, Lyra "felt something strange happen to her body. She felt as if she had been handed a key to a great house she hadn't known was there" (HDM 873). Understandably, Pullman's emphasis may stem from a wish to react directly to traditional condemnations of women's sexuality as sin and the cause of human downfall. However, it may also stem from a Blakean concept which posits a sexual liberation in which "*both* man and woman desire their respective counterpart" (Ankarsjö 66), but at the same time, views woman as "something of a catalyst" (19).

At the end of *His Dark Materials*, when the Fall has restored order and secured the utopian vision, the distinctions between Lyra and Will are more blurred. They are, in some ways, archetypes of male and female: "They [seemed] the true image of what human beings always

could be, once they had come into their inheritance" (*HDM* 893). However, unlike Tolkien's Middle-earth, Pullman's world is one in which archetype does not mean antitype. In the state of experience, in fact, Lyra and Will are far more similar than different, as illustrated in the responses they have to realizing they must live in separate worlds: Lyra begins "shaking with anger and grief" (*HDM* 904) and later, Will begins "gasping and shaking and crying aloud with more anger and pain than he had ever felt" (911). This similarity and overlap between masculine and feminine constructions is in line with Blake's vision of a paradise "where gender does not exist" and "all binaries are dissolved into harmony and male-female togetherness" (Ankarsjö 24). Though, because of their difficult, but adult choice, Will and Lyra cannot be together in a physical sense, on a different level, their growth together has united the masculine and feminine in a blurred, androgynous, and mature human identity.

In Pullman's depiction of the Fall, Adam and Eve (Lyra and Will) are primarily good; that is, they are "kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all … keep their minds open and free and curious" (*HDM* 910). An explication of masculine and feminine evil in *His Dark Materials* requires another set of characters to examine. However, the good and evil binary that exists in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* does not exist in Pullman's world, and therefore one should note that good and evil in *His Dark Materials* apply more aptly to characters' actions than to characters themselves, who defy such categorizations with ambiguity. In the same way, though examining the sex and gender of "evil" characters is useful, it should not be understood to be a definitive placement of one character in a limited gendered sphere. As Pullman himself said, "the moral turns and complexities … make this story very far from the simple" (Pullman, Chattaway par. 5).

That said, the Authority and Metatron, as male dominating usurpers to the throne, are two of the most primarily evil characters in Pullman's world, and reminiscent of Blake's Urizen. Of these two angels, Balthamos explains, "[The Authority] told those who came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie … [he] still reigns in the Kingdom, and Metatron is his Regent" (570). The old Authority represents one facet of Urizen, who is "Ancient of Days," while Metatron, who is perceived by Will as a "vast, brutal, and merciless intellect" (568) represents another facet of Urizen as "cunning and power-mad" (Ankarsjö 99). The evil of Urizen, as that of Metatron and the Authority, is in usurpation: "Am I not God said Urizen / Who is Equal to me" (as qtd. in Ankarsjö 97). Similarly, the male-dominated Magisterium of Lyra's world is an evil construction of masculine power unchecked. Obedience to these false powers is a kind of evil harshly condemned by Pullman.

However, Lord Asriel, who disobeys and declares war on the Authority and the Regent, is still a kind of evil-doer in Pullman's world because he murders a child, Roger, in order to accomplish his goals. He can be compared to Blake's Orc, who roughly symbolizes revolutionary spirit and activity (Damrosch 195). Pullman describes him as "a tall man with powerful shoulders, a fierce dark face, and eyes that seemed to flash and glitter with savage laughter. It was a face to be dominated by, or to fight: never a face to patronize or pity" (*HDM* 10). Interestingly enough, drawing the comparisons between Metatron and Urizen, and Asriel and Orc, makes Pullman's work very similar to Blake's, in which Urizen is "Drawn down by Orc & the Shadowy Female" (as qtd. in Ankarsjö 137). Here, the "Shadowy Female" is Vala, a disobedient female who later redeems herself, and is remarkably similar to Pullman's Marisa Coulter. Thus, in the fact that together Asriel and Coulter bring down Metatron (*HDM* 847), we

see a flawed, yet redemptive sacrifice of equals—"the politically powerful Lord Asriel and the equally powerful Mrs. Coulter" (Bird 112-113).

In contrast to the masculine archetypes of evil in *His Dark Materials*, the Authority and Metatron, who are angels and material if not corporeal, feminine evil in Pullman's world is distinctly flesh-based because it is sexualized. However, sexual expression is not a negative concept in and of itself for Pullman, and the same is true of Blake. Lyra and Will's sexual expression is the much celebrated consciousness-saving Fall; "Blake sees sex as the symbol of freedom" (Damrosch 203). In another of Blake's prophetic works, *America*, an excerpt of which is featured in Pullman's prologue to *The Amber Spyglass*, there is a "reawakening of … lust that has too long been repressed by false religion and political tyranny" (Tannebaum 146).

However, Mrs. Coulter, as a representative of femininely-gendered evil, misuses sexuality for control, instead of freedom. As mentioned before, she is very similar to Blake's Vala, who "dominates through negative sexual strategies" (Ankarsjö 163). Mrs. Coulter is physically alluring, "intoxicating" (*HDM* 650) with "dangerous powers and qualities such as elegance, charm, and grace" (61). Yet she is more than a sexual temptation. When Metatron looks at her, he sees "Corruption and envy and lust for power. Cruelty and coldness. A vicious, probing curiosity. Pure, poisonous, toxic malice … a cesspit of moral filth" (839). Rather than an indictment of women and women's bodies, Susan Matthews sees Mrs. Coulter as Pullman's critique of a "socially constructed femininity that is alluring, entrapping yet destructive" (131). Her power, and her potential to do evil, then, result from a combination of outer beauty and inner horror. This is an interesting contrast to Tolkien's simpler world, in which the beautiful females are good and Shelob, the only ugly female, is evil.

This difference in construction is, in fact, representative of one of the main dividing lines between Pullman and Tolkien. Pullman has criticized Tolkien's work as "trivial" because in it "the basic issues of life [are] not in question" (Pullman, Chattaway par. 22). To the extent in which Tolkien's world is simpler, more external, and contains universal, generally-applicable laws and rules, he is correct. Conversely, Pullman's world is nothing if not complex, with its and daemons, its materialist Dust, and its re-creation of the Fall that questions both secondary and primary world assumptions. As such, Pullman's constructions of gender are a far cry from the straightforward binary of masculine male and feminine female in Middle-earth and medieval literature. Influenced by Blakean "contraries," Pullman's constructions of gender do not fit neatly onto persons but exist within, in characters who possess overlapping qualities of both traditional masculinity and traditional femininity—"a bit of the opposite" or as Bird puts it, "Pullman appears to share Blake's acceptance and appreciation of the human being as a dynamic, inclusive being comprising body and soul, good and evil, the notion being that opposites are inadequate unless synthesised (122).

Taking Bird's analysis one step further, I propose that synthesis is the key to advancing an understanding Tolkien's and Pullman's differing constructions of gender toward an increased overall understanding of their works. Though modern readers (especially female readers) may find the polarization of Tolkien's active masculine males and passive feminine females overly archaic, disconcerting, and maybe even offensive, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is as synthesized a work as Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Its gender binary, though not one of equality or complexity, is well-integrated into Tolkien's overarching medieval secondary world. In the same way, the androgynous interaction of masculine and feminine within each of

Pullman's characters is well integrated into Pullman's ambiguous, complicated moral reinvention of the Blakean Fall.

Both constructions of gender are fitting, even necessary to the unified, though strikingly different "realities" Tolkien and Pullman claim to portray in their fictive worlds. Applying primarily world qualifications to each secondary world's construction of gender makes Tolkien a villain and Pullman a hero, but neither title is accurate. In his own way, each author has synthesized the "opposites" of gender and done so in a comprehensive manner that mirrors that of the other secondary worlds by which they are inspired. *The Lord of the Rings* and *His Dark Materials* may construct gender differently, but in each that construction works to contribute to the overall unity and impact of the story. To say otherwise is, as Pullman himself said, indicative of "the regrettable tendency of humankind to believe in "one size fits all" answers" (Pullman, Chattaway par. 5).

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